1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

riverain and deltaic swamps into which they moved following the establishment of Brooke rule. Some of these down-river communities have been subjected to prolonged European contact which has profoundly modified their way of life. However, the majority of the Iban still live from fifty to a hundred miles from the coast in hilly country that is drained by fast-flowing rivers. Most of these hill tribes have been little influenced by the West and remain pagan and pre-literate. It is with these Iban of the hinterland that this report is chiefly concerned.

This report then, is primarily an account of Iban methods of shifting dry rice cultivation in pioneer areas. It is important to note that it deals—in particular—with conditions existing in the Baleh, and with the social behaviour and customs of the Ulu Ai Iban inhabiting this region. This means that proper safeguards must be observed before applying any of the findings of this report to other Iban areas. Nevertheless, the systems it describes are generally typical of most pioneer areas (i.e. areas where virgin jungle is still being felled and farmed), and probably of about fifty to sixty per cent of the Iban population of Sarawak.

Iban agriculture and Iban methods of land utilization can only be understood in relation to the various corporate groups that characterize Iban society. For this reason this report begins with a brief account of the principal features of Iban social organization. However, these introductory paragraphs are no more than the most summary of prolegomena to the sections dealing with agriculture and land usage that follow. A comprehensive analysis of Iban social structure is being prepared for publication.

Again, because of limitations of space, only passing reference has been made to the elaborate *padi* cult upon which Iban agriculture is based. Upon this fascinating and important subject I was able to collect a great mass of material and it is my intention to discuss it fully in a separate monograph, which will stand as a companion study to the present report. As Haddon truthfully observed: "It is characteristic of the Iban . . . . that the whole of their life is permeated with religious conceptions, and indeed no distinction can be drawn in their daily life between technical and religious operations: they are equally necessary." Certainly, it is only when the inter-dependence of economics, social organization and ritual is understood that there can be any genuine appreciation of the nature of Iban agricultural practice.

This report is concerned with a single aspect of Iban life: their system of agriculture. This was, of course, but one of the many topics studied during the period of my field work and in due course papers and monographs on many other facets of Iban society and culture will be prepared for publication.

I would like to express my appreciation of the many ways in which the Government of Sarawak facilitated my research work, and I am especially grateful to His Excellency, Sir Anthony Abell, K.C.M.G., for his action in approving an extension of my tour so that I might complete certain studies of Iban religion and pay brief visits to parts of the Second Division.

It is difficult to speak too highly of the hospitality and assistance given to both my wife and myself during our stay in Sarawak. In particular our gratitude is due to: Mr. and Mrs. B. Baughman (Methodist Mission, Kapit), Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Drake-Brockman (D.O., Kanowit), Mr. T. Harrisson, Mr. R. W. R. Miller (Director of Agriculture), Mr. and Mrs. W. Nias (N.O., Sibu and Betong), Mr. A. J. N. Richards, Mr. P. Ringkai, Mr. P. Smith (D.O., Kapit), Mr. I. A. N.

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hours (depending on the state of the water) from the main long-house. At Rumah Tungku, in the Sungai Tiau (a long-house of 50 *bilek* families), the farms were dispersed over an area of about 15 square miles, and the majority of them could only be reached by canoe. Similar conditions prevailed at most of the other long-houses which I visited, and had any of them been selected as a site for research, it would have been extremely difficult to have obtained a comprehensive view of the farming activities of the whole community. Rumah Nyala presented me with the great advantage of being able to move about at will, and the most distant of the farms could be reached in a tramp of about three hours. Another important consideration was that at Rumah Nyala a wide variety of different land was being cultivated, so that I was able to observe the felling and farming of primary, and many different types of secondary jungle, and to make valuable comparisons.

66. Iban agriculture, as may have become apparent, is an extremely complex subject. In particular, it is complicated by elaborate ritual acts and concepts which are all elements of cardinal importance. Throughout the agricultural cycle ritual and labour are inextricably interwoven. Every stage in the actual cultivation of the *padi* is accompanied by rites which, in Iban eyes, are vital to the success of a crop. This continuum is a formidable labyrinth of diverse elements, and its complexity poses difficult problems in description and presentation. For the purposes of this report, I propose to begin with a discussion of settlement patterns, and then pass on to the *padi* cycle, and the techniques employed by Iban cultivators. Other sections will be devoted to the economics of agriculture, and methods of land usage. In the course of the discussion, frequent reference will be made to the magico-religious beliefs and practices of the Iban, but no more than passing reference. On the *padi* cult of the Iban I was able to collect a great mass of information, for it is still a living reality. I plan to deal fully with this most important and fascinating subject in a separate monograph, which will stand as a supplement to this present report. It must constantly be borne in mind however, that all these elements are integral parts of a single process; indeed, only when the inter-dependence of economics, social organization and ritual are understood can there be any genuine appreciation of the nature of Iban agricultural practice.

Shifting Cultivation and Settlement Patterns

67. Shifting cultivation may be briefly defined as an economy of which the main characteristics are "rotation of fields rather than crops; clearing by means of fire; absence of draft animals and of manuring; use of human labour only; employment of the dibble stick . . . . ; short periods of soil occupancy alternating with long fallow periods."[1]

68. The practice of shifting cultivation means that each family unit requires for its subsistence an extensive area of land. When working in virgin jungle it is usual for the Iban to cultivate half or more of a farm for two years in succession, but with rare exceptions a proportion of new forest is felled each year. In secondary jungle, on the other hand, it is normal for the whole of the farmed area to be abandoned after one crop has been taken. Iban methods of land usage, as will be explained presently, are complex, but when land is finally allowed to revert to secondary growth, it is left for as long as possible, and this is often for a

[1]K. J. Pelzer, "Pioneer Settlement in the Asiatic Tropics: Studies in Land Utilization and Agricultural Colonization in Southeastern Asia," New York, 1945, p. 17. ("Other terms for shifting cultivation are field-forest economy and field-forest rotation").

11:Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1957 OC6 Iban OC6

happened should spread throughout the long-house bringing her shame (*malu*). The breakages—as soon as she could bring herself to speak of the matter—she vehemently attributed to the poor quality of the clay (*tanah jai*, lit., bad clay) from which she had modelled the pots. Punai (from the neighbouring *bilek*) suggested that the pots had been dried for too long (i.e. above Runin's hearth) before firing. Irin (Runin's sister-in-law) and Bagop (the son of Runin's deceased sister) were both of the opinion that someone must have emitted wind, while the clay was being collected; they added that even if this had happened without audible noise it was still enough to cause breakages during firing. Runin immediately took up this theory and developed it: the deposit of clay in question, being directly opposite the long-house, was much used; beyond doubt, she argued, many others must have emitted wind while gathering it, and so the deposit as a whole had become tainted and worthless. With clay gathered from further inland (near her *padi* farm), which had not been put to such promiscuous use Runin went on, she had never had any failures. ("*Enda kala suba*," she averred, "Never before has this kind of thing happened").

Here (it may be noted in passing) we have a good example of the way in which the Iban system of magical prohibitions, or *pemali*, is used to account for and explain technical and human shortcomings. The bursting of the pots (to take the example at hand) is seen as evidence of the validity of the taboo, and on the presumption that the taboo has been broken the individual to whose activities it refers is absolved from blame. In this way a system of magical prohibitions performs an important social function, for by attributing blameworthy actions to mystical agency the individuals who have committed them are freed from responsibility, discord is avoided and the composure of the group preserved.

Her self-esteem restored, Runin went on to remark that, in general, breakages during firing were rare. Just how accurate this claim is I am unable definitely to say, for during my stay in Sarawak I did not witness another firing of pots. However, my impression, from the enquiries and observations that I did make, is that with the Iban technique of firing breakages must be not uncommon.

18:Sutlive E,M-5 (1957-1971) 1973 OC6 Iban OC6
Sibu

IBAN ADAPTATION

182 The Ibans' adaptation to their habitat has included a number of different activities and responses. These have been expressed in the techniques and rituals which they have used to acquire the food and other goods which they have deemed necessary for their living, and in the ways in which they have organized themselves to make meaningful the responses they have made to both their physical habitat and their cultural environments.

243 Traditionally, the Ibans' quest for food has been divided among a number of different activities, the most important being rice horti- [188] culture. As we discuss in some detail in this chapter, rice cultivation is a highly ritualized activity with symbols which are interrelated with [171] a number of other highly valued practices. As with numerous other peoples, rice cultivation is not merely a technique of acquisition but a way of life that is supported by and in turn supports Iban theology, cosmology and eschatology. We will consider in a later chapter on Iban culture the basic value of self-sufficiency, by which members of the society are scaled in the class system.

243 [162] Less than forty per cent of Iban cultivators are self-sufficient in rice, and must supplement their farming with other means of obtaining their food supply.

18:Sutlive E,M-5 (1957-1971) 1973 OC6 Iban OC6 Sibu

464 employment. In the opinion of many young people, there is no future for them in the longhouse, and in the minds of older members of the society, cash income is synonymous with work (kerja). Of the population of Rumah Nyala, Sungai Aup, fifty-five of the members are wage-earners, either commuting daily into Sibu, or away for months or even years at their jobs. Of the aggregation of seven longhouses in Bawang Assan below Sibu, more than three hundred of the community members are salaried.

183 Classification of the Iban as a people of a subsistence economy is dubious. For they have been a people who have maintained a cultural norm of achievement through production and in predation. As in many other societies, some members have achieved according to the ideal, others have fallen short.

1977 The contacts over the past century with members of ethnic groups, especially Chinese and Malays, have been influential in effecting changes in traditional Iban adaptation. Further, the growth of the pasar as a center of administrative, commercial, service and recreational activities has resulted in a new orientation and new expectations among the Iban.

[182] The Ibans of this District no longer can be categorized in their adaptation as "rice cultivators," for they have responded to the numbers of opportunities in almost as many ways, so that the economic organization of the Ibans is already highly diversified and promises to be increasingly more so.

231 have been kept, the owners invariably have sold them or slaughtered the animals for gawai.

182 Iban adaptation is divided among a number of activities in response to the physical habitat and social environment in which they live. The principal means of acquiring their food for a majority of families is through rice horticulture. Because of the insufficiency of yields, about 64 per cent of all families have to purchase rice with money received for wages or from the sale of rubber, pepper or other produce. Fishing, collecting and keeping livestock are the other major ways Ibans supplement their food and income.

THE BILIK-FAMILY

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182 The fundamental unit of Iban society is the bilik-family.[1] Adapting as they have to poor soils which would not support a large population; to uncontrollable elements such as rainfall and flooding, drought and blight, and pests beyond measure; and with their techniques of shifting cultivation accompanied by extensive ritual activities, the Ibans have selected and placed a premium upon the bilik-family as an autonomous producing and consuming unit.

592
[602] The bilik-family tends to be small and flexible in receiving and releasing members who enjoy a high degree of mobility. Bilateral attachment permits members to exploit ties from both parents' kin-groups to their maximum benefit. And organization of bilik-families in the longhouse system has provided defense when head-hunting still was in vogue, labor when a larger work-force is required during the periods of clearing and harvesting the rice fields, and supplements to supplies for festive activities.

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[114] [104] [1]This spelling differs from Freeman's bilik (1970:2), but is consonant with Scott (1955:29) and current spellings of Iban. The final vowel is a glide and best represented by the phoneme /i/, for in Iban the letter "e" is commonly used to indicate a schwa.